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SUBJECT: MOROCCO: TAKING STEPS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

¶1. Summary: Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi launched the Fifth National Campaign to Eliminate Violence against Women on November 30 in Rabat, marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. For the first time, the Government of Morocco (GOM) released official statistics on domestic violence, having documented more than 17,000 incidents in 2006-2007. This year, the two week campaign was built around the theme of "Mobilizing Youth in the Fight against Violence on Women." The Ministry of Social Development Family and Solidarity is in the lead. End Summary.

¶2. The GOM's anti-violence publicity campaign was conducted from November 30 until December 17, and included a variety of TV and radio spots. A "sensitivity caravan" was organized in collaboration with the UNFPA and the Canadian International Development Agency and distributed information during multi-media presentations in eight cities (Rabat, Casablanca, Fez, Beni Mellal, Oujda, Marrakech, Safi, and Ouarzazate.) Two days were dedicated to public awareness raising of the problem with roundtables for youth organized in coordination with local associations and regional educational and training academies in Fez, Casablanca, and Marrakech.

¶3. In his opening remarks, PM El Fassi announced the launch of a National Observatory to Eliminate Violence Against Women to act as a coordination mechanism for governmental and non-governmental institutions working to assist female victims of violence. El Fassi also announced that his government will table two substantial reforms, a bill that will criminalize domestic violence (already pending before Parliament) and another that will address the illegal practice of employing underage girls as child domestic servants.

¶4. During the November 30 event, the Ministry of Social Development, Families, and Solidarity reported that marital violence, a category that includes all forms of physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence by the husband, accounted for 82 percent of the 17,511 reported cases of violence from 2006 to 2007. This is the first time that official numbers on violence against women have been published. Other statistics put forth during the conference show that 44 percent of Moroccan women who are victims of violence are between 18 and 24 years old, and 35 percent are between 25 and 34 years old. About three-fourths of the victims are housewives. Fifty-eight percent of people filing complaints said they had been victims of violence for several months and 37 percent said they have been victims for many years.

¶5. One week prior to the launching of the National Campaign, a women's NGO, the Democratic League of Women's Rights (LDDH), published a report on the first half of 2007 which stated that over 96 percent of the cases of violence against

women were committed by a close relative. It showed that housewives comprised 57 percent of registered victims of violence, and that 88 percent of the battered women were between the ages of 18 and 48. The report also indicated that what it termed economic violence (the failure to meet familial or child support financial obligations), represented 37.31 percent of the cases, while physical violence ranked second at 22.75 percent. (Note: Governmental and non-governmental agencies are working to resolve discrepancies in the statistics. End Note.)

¶6. Clinical Psychologist Nadia Cherkaoui said that the level of tolerance for violence against women in Morocco remains extremely high. She explained that in most cases women seek help only when their lives or those of their children are threatened. This means that the majority of incidents are un-reported.

¶7. Long considered a culturally taboo subject, the GOM only began addressing violence against women publicly (albeit timidly) in 1998. In 2001, the Ministry of Social Development, Families, and Solidarity began to develop a national anti-violence strategy in collaboration with civil society and with support from UNFPA, UNIFEM and the UNDP. The collaboration helped usher in reforms such as the revised family code and the creation of abuse assistance centers. New Minister of Social Development, Families, and Solidarity, Nouzha Skalli has said that combating violence against women is her top priority, but she and her Ministry are hampered by a lack of financial and technical resources.

¶8. In addition to Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi, a number of senior members of the government attended the conference. Among them were Minister of Labor and Professional Training

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Jamal Aghmani, Minister of National Education Ahmed Akhchichine, Minister Delegate of Modernizing the Public Sector Mohammed Abbou, and a representative of the Royal Gendarmerie. Over a dozen Human Rights and Women's NGOs were also represented, including Union Action Feminine (UAF), Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), and Association Marocaine des Droits de la Femme (ADFM).

¶9. Comment: Violence against women represents the most visible evidence of the continuing struggle for gender equality in Morocco. The GOM appears to be addressing it in a sincere and constructive fashion, but is hampered by a lack of resources, an outmoded legal system and lagging social attitudes about the role of women in society. We believe the issue of domestic violence in Morocco offers significant potential programming opportunities for DRL and MEPI funds. End Comment.

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